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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

XGDS-4

DATE: August 9, 1978

PARTICIPANTS: Rear Admiral Rodolfo Luchetta, Navy Deputy
Secretary General
F. Allen Harris, Political Officer,
American Embassy, Buenos Aires *J*

PLACE: Navy Headquarters

SUBJECT: Argentine-U.S. Relations

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I phoned Admiral Luchetta this morning to extend my condolences regarding the recent bombing of Admiral Lambruschini's home. Luchetta immediately invited me for coffee later in the day.

Aftershocks of Lambruschini Bombing

After the usual friendly greetings, Luchetta handed me a large envelope. Inside was a dramatic aerial view of the bomb damage to the Lambruschini apartment building. He pointed out the room in which Paula Lambruschini had died. Luchetta said that the bombing was a disaster in all respects. He said putting "heart and emotion" aside and thinking about the problem, there was no other conclusion that the bombing would strengthen the hardliners and destroy the Navy's efforts for political progress in the near future. He added that it will spill over on the relations between the United States and Argentina and things will get worse.

In response to elicitation, Luchetta said the Navy was not convinced that the Montoneros had in fact planted the bomb. He said that the fact that the explosive used was nitro-glycerin pointed to a conclusion that the bomb was planted by elements of the extreme right. He emphasized that whether the explosives had been planted by the extreme left

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2

or extreme right the effect would be the same--a halting of progress towards political development.

Luchetta noted that Admiral Massera had planned to raise the Timerman case at the Junta meeting on August 3, but with the bombing that was clearly impossible. He said that his personal opinion was that the visit of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission would now not be possible.

I commented that I shared his assessment as to the political effect of the bombing. I noted that the 10 persons killed in "shootouts" with government forces and a bomb accident in Mar del Plata were seen as another hardline response to the bombing. Luchetta raised his eyebrows and nodded in quiet agreement.

Massera Visit

Luchetta inquired how the Massera request for an invitation was going. Luchetta mentioned that if Massera was not extended an invitation by the CNO, Argentina would not participate in the upcoming UNITAS Operations. He stated that earlier Argentine participation in UNITAS had been an operationally important training exercise as a lot of technology transfer had taken place. But, he emphasized, that the present UNITAS exercise was primarily a political event ("para tomar copas").

Luchetta said that Massera currently was very skeptical about taking any initiatives in which the United States was interested such as the list of the dead, Timerman's release, and visit of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission. Massera's view now was "Why should I push. What does it gain for us? The U.S. has been nothing but a headache."

Luchetta stated flatly that he sensed growing hostility toward the U.S. in his contacts. He questioned why the U.S. had not protested loudly the bombing of the Lambruschini apartment. When I reminded him of the State Department's announcement, he replied that the statement was the minimal response.

The New Junta

Luchetta stated that the Junta had made a smooth transition from Videla to Viola. He noted that the Junta would continue to be active and would be meeting at least once a week. He

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3

noted that the Junta would meet next week at both a working breakfast and a regular meeting. He predicted that the Embassy would be surprised by Lambruschini's performance as a Junta member. He said that Lambruschini would continue following the same independent political policy lines that Massera has pushed within the Junta.

Political Program

Luchetta showed me a document which was a one-page outline for a successful political program. Two of the political tips at the top of the page were "work extensively on public relations image" and "choose only a few key issues to focus on."

Gloom

Luchetta concluded the meeting by stating that he was not optimistic regarding US-Argentine relations improving any time in near future. I reminded him that there were still a substantial number of clandestine anti-subversive activities being conducted and that I had seen little evidence of the government's effort to control these operations which were a major block for improved relations. Luchetta minimally acknowledged this comment by responding that these groups were controlled by the feudal Army Corps commanders.

CLEARANCES: POL:AGFreeman
DCM:MChaplin

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